

Theme: Quality Assurance for Enhancement of Higher Education in Ethiopia

Sub-theme: Quality Assurance for Enhancement

Title: Quality Assurance for Enhancement of Higher Education in Ethiopia: challenges faced and lessons learned

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Abstract:

Since its establishment in 2003, among the most important work of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) has been the conduct of external institutional quality audits. One of the outcomes of audits is the finding that, despite the efforts of HERQA and others, higher education institutions have made only modest progress in establishing robust and comprehensive quality assurance systems. While higher education institutions have embraced the quality concept, many have yet to develop quality assurance policies and strategies and establish efficient structures that can systematically assure quality. A number of quality-related problems persist. Paramount among these is human capacity. There is a general lack of expertise in quality-related processes in higher education institutions. This also impacts on the work of HERQA as it seeks to recruit credible academics with the necessary combination of awareness and experience to assist it in undertaking external quality audits. While helping to bring quality to the top of the agenda by carrying out quality audits and accreditations, HERQA has learned much in the interval since its establishment. This paper is offered in the hope that the lessons learned can be of value to sister agencies.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED IN THE PAPER

1. **Higher Education Institution (HEI)** – in the context of this paper, a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is a University, University College or College that offers one or more degree awarding programs.
2. **Pre-accreditation permit** - Permission granted to a higher education institution to function for only one year based on an assessment of an institution's program(s) by experts from selected HEIs and HERQA mainly on the basis of human, material input and the curriculum(s) the HEI has put in place.
3. **Accreditation permit** - permission granted to a higher education institution to function for three further years beginning from the end of the pre-accreditation period. This is based on an assessment of the program(s) of the institution for which it had been granted pre-accreditation by experts from selected HEI's.
4. **Renewal of accreditation /reaccreditation--** Renewal of accreditation /reaccreditation is a permission granted to a higher education institution to function for three further years beginning from the end of the accreditation period. This is based on an assessment of the program(s) of the institution for which it had been granted accreditation by experts from selected HEIs and HERQA.
5. **Institutional Quality Audit** - An institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and of the teaching and learning environment. Equally importantly, an institutional quality audit will assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of a HEI's approach to quality care, its systems of accountability and its internal review mechanisms as set out in HERQA Profile, 2006.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE PAPER

AD	Administrative Department
EQUIP	Educational Quality Improvement Program
EQA	External Quality Audit
ESDP	Education Sector Development Program
HEI(s)	Higher Education Institution(s)
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
MOE	Ministry of Education
QAET	Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team
QA	Quality Assurance
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency

PART ONE

1.1 Background

Until the final decade of the 20th century, higher education in Ethiopia was not given due attention, its curriculum was not always relevant to the country's problems nor was its capacity in line with the country's needs for trained individuals (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2002). However, actions have been implemented to change that situation. The Ethiopian Government is working to re-align its higher education system so that it can contribute more directly to its national strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction (Saint, 2004). There has been a steady increase in the number of students in higher education. Between 1994 and 2002 alone there was a 45% increase (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2002). In December 2001 the government reported that the total number of students enrolled in regular degree programs had increased from 13,347 in 1996/97 to 23,320 in 2000/01. On average the total number of students was growing at 15.0% per annum (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2001) It is also stated "because of the two national Education Sector Development Programs, the growth at all levels in higher education, but particularly in the government sector, is the highest of all educational levels-enrolment with an annual average increase of over 33% per year" (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2007).

The number of public higher education institutions has also grown from only two universities eight years ago to more than 20 in 2008/2009. More are planned to be established. The Government has also facilitated and encouraged the establishment of private institutions of higher education and there are now more than 60 such institutions.

Sensitive to the fact that expansion of numbers alone would not satisfy the needs of the country, Higher Education Proclamation 351 (Ethiopian Federal Ministry of Education, 2003) made provision for the creation of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) and this was established in 2003 (Higher Education Proclamation no.351/2003) with the aim of safeguarding and enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in the country. Its mission includes: ensuring that accredited HEIs are of an appropriate standard; establishing that the programs of study offered by these HEIs are of an appropriate quality and relevance to the world of work and the development needs of the country; and

supporting the country's higher education sector in enhancing the quality and relevance of its education provision.

HERQA has therefore undertaken several activities to date, including: pre-accreditation and accreditation of a number of programs in private higher education institutions; external quality audits in all the public and some private higher education institutions training of its staff, both locally and abroad, on issues of quality and relevance assurance and enhancement; convening of consultative and training workshops with stakeholders (public and private institution leaders, managers and academic staff and representatives from government organizations and professional associations); development of draft benchmarks for selected subjects; and the publication of procedures for external quality audits and accreditation processes.

The purpose of this paper is therefore threefold: to describe those activities undertaken for enhancing the quality of higher education in Ethiopia; to outline the experience of conducting external quality audits of HEIs in Ethiopia and: to point out some of the major lessons HERQA has drawn from experience through the years and to lay out some of challenges that arise and the plans it has envisages implementing in the future.

1.2 Methodology

The study is done on the basis of a careful analysis of the information gained from the various publications HERQA put out at different times and the eight external quality audit reports of the public universities that the Agency has recently made public. In addition, the personal experience of the writers has been used.

1.3 HERQA's Work in Promoting Quality and the Development of Quality Assurance Systems in HEIs in Ethiopia

1.3.1 The Agency

HERQA is structured in such a way that it can handle its affairs with little bureaucratic red tape. It has developed a flat organizational structure. This has many advantages: it encourages individuals in the organization to cooperate with each other towards achieving the goals of the organization as a whole; in addition, in a rapidly changing context, it enables resources, including people, to be deployed flexibly across tasks.

Currently HERQA has a Director, 9 senior experts, 3 experts, and 15 administrative and support workers. The experts have been grouped in three major sections, namely: a Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, an Accreditation team, and Administrative Department. Additionally, two small teams work on human resource development and policy and strategy of the Agency. All the experts are accountable to the Director General of the Agency while having horizontal relationship among them at the same time.

Earlier the administrative department was serving both HERQA and another sister organization housed on the same building. Since the beginning of 2007 however, due to the expansion of the work of the Agency and the staff, it has become essential for HERQA to have its own administrative staff. This recent move has helped the Agency to be more effective in facilitating the quality assurance and enhancement services it is providing to the stakeholders.

1.3. 2 Institutional Quality Audit and Enhancement

Institutional quality audit in HERQA's context is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and of the teaching and learning environment. Equally importantly, an institutional quality audit will assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of a HEI's approach to quality care, its systems of accountability and its internal quality assurance mechanisms.

Institutional Quality Audit and Enhancement is primarily undertaken by the Quality Audit and Enhancement Team (QAET). The team comprises five members. It is specifically set up with the aim of ensuring the higher education and training offered at any institution is up to standard, relevant and of acceptable quality. The aim is to evaluate institutions at least once every five years with a view to establishing whether such institutions are up to standard and competent with a view to submitting its findings to the Ministry of Education. It is therefore primarily engaged in conducting external institutional quality audits in both private and public higher education institutions. So far 9 public and 5 private HEIs have been audited and 8 quality audit reports have been published (for a summary of the outcome of the audits see Part II).

Members of QAET are also involved in various training aimed at enhancing quality enhancement and establishing quality assurance systems in the HEIs. The training focuses on

issues such as how to conduct self evaluation, preparing policies and guidelines for assessment, teaching/learning, research and outreach activities. Within the past six months alone, the Agency's experts were able to provide training for more than two public and six private and other non-governmental higher education institutions for up to 150 instructors, administrators and leaders in and outside Addis Ababa, the capital of the country. These workshops, symposiums and trainings were supported by organizations such as VSO, an international development organization that currently works to assist in the fight to make poverty history in developing countries and NUFFIC, a Dutch organization which funds the ASSIST Project.

As a quality assurance agency monitoring higher education institutions and helping them to enhance the quality of education and training they are providing, HERQA needs to have adequate and highly qualified staff. Thus in 2007, a Human Resource Plan was drafted, deliberated on and endorsed by the higher body. Two staff members have been given a chance to go abroad and study for their Master's degree while the rest of the experts who have qualifications of Master's and above made exposure visits to various countries in Africa, Asia and Europe.

As a major guardian institution in ensuring quality and relevance of higher education in Ethiopia, HERQA should be engaged in appropriate research and studies (HERQA Strategic Plan 2006/7-2009/10, 2006). Recently a Research Strategy has been prepared with the help of a consultant from United Kingdom. The strategy outlines the relationship of the strategic plan for research with the mission and vision of HERQA and its general strategic plan. It analyses HERQA's present position with respect to research and the key drivers of change. As regards this, some members of the staff have been engaged in research activities. Some of the topics being explored are assessment problems in HEIs, the accreditation procedure of HERQA and the Perception of Quality of Instructors and Students in HEIs.

In addition, as part of the quality enhancement effort, HERQA is helping higher education institutions develop subject benchmarks which they can use while developing curricula. So far bench marks for 11 disciplines (Nursing, Midwifery, Laboratory Technology, Public Health, Business Management, Mathematics, Chemistry, Computer Science, Biology, Medical Science and Agricultural engineering) have been developed after the concerned scholars in

the area and departments and faculties in various higher education institutions commented on them.

Furthermore, fifty-two instructors from private and public higher education institutions received training in two rounds. The workshops were conducted with the help of professional practitioners invited from South Africa and the Netherlands and a VSO volunteer member of HERQA's staff.

The Agency also conducted various symposiums and workshops involving professionals from the HEIs and other stakeholders to develop protocols, guidelines etc necessary for the preparation of self evaluation documents and external quality audits. In 2006 for instance, three national workshops were organized where a number of papers were discussed and debated and a mutual understanding of these key concepts reached among stakeholders. In addition, quality audit protocols were developed with the participation of professionals from the HEIs. The protocols were piloted in two public universities and three private university colleges and the outcomes were presented to a stakeholders' conference in June 2006 so that public and private higher education institutions could learn from the experience and move forward to establish quality care systems, undertake internal quality audits and prepare self assessment reports for the Agency.

1.3.3 Accreditation

Among the foremost responsibilities of HERQA are pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation of private higher education institutions and some other nongovernmental institutions. What this entails is described above (Page 3).

Pre-accreditation, accreditation and reaccreditation of private higher education institutions is coordinated and conducted by the accreditation team of the Agency. The team is composed of 5 senior experts and 2 experts. From 2006 up to the end of 2008, 185 programs were granted pre-accreditation permits and 190 programs were accredited. As the experts' number is not compatible with the number of private HEIs offering education and training at undergraduate and graduate level in the country, experts from QAECT and instructors from private and public HEIs are invited on a regular basis specifically to assist in evaluating curricula and facilities that private higher education institutions have put in place.

Number of pre-accredited and accredited HEIs from 2006-2008

Year	Pre-accreditation				Accreditation			
	Granted		Denied		Granted		Denied	
	P	I	P	I	P	I	P	I
2006	87	30	32	13	64	21	-----	-----
2007	63	19	74	17	36	12	37	8
2008	35	18	62	18	90	31	31	12
Total	185	67	168	48	190	64	68	20

P = Number of programs I = Number of Private HEIs

The team is also involved in the preparation of checklists, guidelines and training of personnel from private higher education institutions. Accordingly, with the aim of facilitating the work of the external assessors and helping the private HEIs to recognize the standards and minimum requirements by which they will be assessed, 7 volumes of guidelines, checklists and procedures for Pre-accreditation and Accreditation, were developed with the participation of stakeholders and on the basis of the Higher Education Proclamation. In relation to this, two major workshops aiming at developing a guideline for the pre-accreditation, accreditation and reaccreditation of virtual learning involving stakeholders were conducted in 2007. Further, the guidelines for pre-accreditation, accreditation re-accreditation and distance learning were reviewed and a new guideline for the regulation of virtual learning has been designed.

HERQA with the aim of controlling fraudulent private higher education institutions conducted a series of surprise inspections in Addis Ababa. In 2008, the accreditation team, along with experts from the quality audit team, visited more than 10 private institutions in and outside Addis Ababa and from 4 -16 January 2009 more than 30 additional private higher education institutions in Addis Ababa . The visits were meticulously planned and appropriate tools such as questionnaires, observation checklists and interview questions were prepared beforehand to identify those HEIs that are not operating in accordance with the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education and the accreditation criteria of HERQA. It is also scheduled to repeat the exercise in relation to private HEIs outside Addis Ababa.

One of HERQA's mandates set out in the proclamation under Article 82 is to provide information to stakeholders, namely: give information to the public about the current situation and status of the institutions periodically and; gather and disseminate information about the standards and programs of study offered by foreign higher education institutions as well as about their general status. Apart from conducting symposia and workshops, a series of documents containing a list of higher education institutions offering education and training at the level of undergraduate and graduate programs, guidelines for pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation permits have been published and distributed. Some of the documents have also been uploaded on the Agency's website, www.higher.edu.et. (See Appendix 2)

As per the Strategic Plan of the Agency, a communication strategy has also been prepared with the financial help of the ASSIST- HERQA Project. A newsletter called "HERQA News" is also being issued on a quarterly basis and distributed to all HEIs- both private and public- and other stakeholders giving up-to-date information on the activities of the Agency.

Further, the public are repeatedly advised through the national media to come to the Agency in person and check the status of private higher education institutions before they go ahead and register for a program. Documents are also kept at the information desk of the Agency for whoever wants to check. In 2007, HERQA had a chance to participate in one big exhibition coordinated and conducted by private higher education institutions and other academic organizations and publicize the works of the Agency.

PART TWO

2.1 Procedures and Outcomes of the External Institutional Quality Audits

HERQA currently uses external institutional quality audits for both public and private higher education institutions. An institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and of the teaching and learning environment. Equally importantly, an institutional quality audit will assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of a HEI's approach to quality care, its systems of accountability and its internal review mechanisms. (HERQA Profile, 2006).

The quality audit focuses on the evaluation of the quality of HEIs as a whole, assessing what mechanisms for quality assurance are in place, and the extent it can be established that the degrees awarded by the institution in fact do guarantee that the level of the graduating students is properly reflected in the degree concerned.

The institutional quality audit proceeds through a number of stages. The initial action is a self evaluation by the HEI to be audited. The external institutional quality audit itself is carried out during a four day visit to the HEI by a team of trained auditors from HERQA and from other HEIs. The key purpose of the audit visit is to validate the self evaluation document submitted by the HEI being audited. During the visit the team studies documentation, visits facilities, meets with staff and students and observes teaching. Following the institutional quality audit visit, the audit team drafts an audit report. Further to the issue of the external institutional quality audit report, the HEI is asked to prepare an action plan that seeks to enhance the quality and relevance of its provision. HERQA requests a copy of this plan and monitors its implementation in subsequent institutional quality audits which evaluate the extent to which the HEI has been able to use its action plan to enhance quality and relevance.

Since 2006, HERQA has conducted 18 external quality audits on 11 public and 7 private HEIs, out of which 4 were pilot quality audits. HERQA completed and published the reports for 8 public universities and (see Appendix 1) and some of the major outcomes of the quality audits indicated in these audit reports are summarized as follows:

2.2 Quality Assurance System or Mechanisms

Analysis of all the audit reports shows that HEIs are aware of the necessity of assuring quality in the institutions. The major problem is that the quality assurance system or mechanisms are not fully in place. In most of the audited HEIs there are no systems in place for obtaining data

that can be used to judge the quality of the institutions. As an instance, the audit report for Bahir Dar University, found in the north western part of the country, explains that the University has a plan to establish a quality assurance office although it is noted that “quality assurance does not yet appear in the organizational structure”. Neither does the university seem to have recognized that “quality assurance requires the establishment of robust procedures and a cycle of monitoring feedback and actions that ensures development”. The quality audit report of Adama University also states that although there are signs that the University is committed to quality assurance, “it has no written policy on quality assurance nor as yet any designated committee or unit with a specific and unique responsibility for this function”.

In general all the audit reports show that the institutions do not have a comprehensive and robust system for quality assurance that can be demonstrated as operating effectively and, consequently, it is very difficult for them to make any claims regarding the quality of the education they are providing.

2.3 Assessment

There seems inconsistency of assessment methods used in all the audited HEIs. Grades are awarded relative to other students rather than the achievement of predetermined performance criteria. In most of the audited universities the departments do not involve moderation. This is due to many reasons. In the first place, the number of students received by the institutions is growing from year to year and this has made it very difficult for the instructors to go through the question papers more than once. The other reason is most of the instructors lack experience and training in efficient conducts of assessment.

Although some departments have introduced other assessment methods, student assessment is mostly dominated by mid semester and end-of-semester examinations. The Bahir Dar University report, for instance, indicates that the EQA team found no evidence that continuous assessment is widely practiced.

In general, student assessment is mostly dominated by norm referencing and does not involve moderation. The assessment systems are insufficiently robust to assure compatibility of grading standards between cohorts of students. There is also a concern for fairness. In many higher education institutions there is no sufficiently transparent system that ensures that

students are graded fairly and consistently. While students can appeal against their grade this must be seen as an additional mechanism and not the sole mechanism that guarantees fairness. Similarly, without inter-institution moderation HERQA has a concern for grade comparability between different higher education institutions.

2.4 Curriculum Review and Design Procedures

Every HEI is expected to justify the relevance of its program and to have robust procedures for curriculum design, approval and review. HERQA auditors investigate the extent of involvement of external professionals and employers in the process of curriculum design, evaluation and review.

The audit reports illustrate that while all the audited HEIs do engage in curriculum development, some report that they also use curricula developed in other institutions. Others report that they implement some curricula “given by the Ministry of Education”. Some report that they involve external peers and other stakeholders in curriculum development workshops only when they consider they lack the necessary expertise themselves. Many record that for one reason or another that they have not always been able to involve external stakeholders from business and industry. In some cases this is because of time constraints, in others it is lack of awareness of informed stakeholders and in others it is reported as an unwillingness of colleagues from business and industry to participate.

With regard to curriculum review, external institutional quality audit teams have read legislation requiring the regular review of curricula and the need to involve external stakeholders in the review process. However, this is not what actually been practiced in the audited universities.

2.5 Research and Outreach Activities in the Higher Education Institutions

The quality audit reports show that all of the HEIs audited aspire to contribute to the development of the country through problem solving researches. This is mostly reflected on the visions, missions and goals of the institutions which usually are stated in the strategic plans and other legislative documents. One can perceive that all of the audited universities have firm convictions that research plays a crucial role in developing the economy, thereby reducing the levels of poverty and attendant risk of strife in the country.

Arba Minch University, for instance, aspires to conduct relevant, fundamental and problem solving researches, whereas Jimma University promises to undertake academically rigorous

and socially meaningful cutting edge research, disseminate knowledge and technologies, and provide consultancies to the public. Jimma University also claims to train high caliber professionals through community based teaching and team based research.

In all the HEIs there are Research and Publication officers to help the Academic and Research Vice Presidents assigned by the administration. Some of them even have developed research policies and guidelines and publish various journals. The guidelines of research prepared by Jimma (or Bahirdar) University can be a case in point.

It is also encouraging to see that the audited universities have created links and research collaborations with organizations within Ethiopia and abroad. These collaborations provide funding, training and technical and managerial support. As the external audit reports show, Mekele, Hawassa, Jimma and Haramaya Universities have been doing a great deal of work in this regard.

Regardless of these efforts, senior staff and administrators indicated that there are a number of hurdles that have to be tackled if the institutions want to realize what they claim to achieve in their mission and vision statements and, ultimately, contribute to the development of the economy.

2.6 Infrastructure and Resources

It is in the government's plan to build and purchase more and more infrastructure and learning resources to go with the expansion of the Higher Education institutions across the country. However the quality audit reports show that most of the audited universities are suffering from shortage of classrooms and learning resources. While auditing Bahirdar University for instance it was indicated that the university is suffering badly from long delays in the completion of buildings and the new buildings that have been handed over for use were reported as being poorly finished and not up to the standard.

Most classrooms are reported as over-crowded, modestly equipped. The audit report for Hawassa University indicates that "while class size can be 80-100 students, most classrooms accommodate only 70 students. Crowded classrooms compromise the quality of teaching and learning". In spite of the good provision of laboratory equipment chemicals for practical work by the government, there seems to be a systemic lack in the management and maintenance of

these resources. In Hawassa University for instance some expensive lab equipment was not used “because of lack of software”.

In all, while the Federal Government of Ethiopia has made a huge investment in higher education, including a massive building program, external institutional quality audits indicate that many institutions consider themselves to be short of resources. However, few institutions have sound systems to ensure efficient resource management.

2.7 Expertise and Experience of staff

All of the HEIs audited reported that they have a lack of experienced and trained staff in teaching and research skills. As part of the government’s expansion of the higher education system, new graduates have been assigned to teaching posts. Although the Academic Development and Resource Centers (ADRCs) - established in the 9 established public universities by the Education Quality Improvement Program (EQUIP)¹ - have provided training to instructors in teaching methods and assessments, it was established during the external quality audits that instructors almost always use the lecture method while teaching and use norm referenced assessment.

Most of the staff members who are engaged in research in the audited institutions complain that there are a number of problems that make it very difficult for the staff to engage actively in research activities. One of these is that there are no incentive mechanisms to encourage them to stay in the area. Further, the instructors in all the audited universities indicated that the heavy load of teaching has made it hard for them to employ 25% of their time to do research as prescribed in the legislations of the institutions. Lack of training in research skills is also one of the problems pointed out by the instructors.

2.8 Communication with Stakeholders

Doing research is not an end itself, neither is it a stand-alone process. The result of research projects should be communicated to the stakeholders so that they can be of instrumental in improving the lives of the community. Some research has also to be executed with the help and participation of the stakeholders. Regarding this, most participants of the discussions during the external quality audits explained that there are not enough journals to publish their researches. Some of them even reported that it has become difficult to initiate and sustain

¹ EQUIP is an outreach NGO of Freix University, Amsterdam and supported by the Dutch Government funding agency NUFFIC.

their own journals. The few research journals available are not open to inexperienced researchers. In addition, not many research symposia and workshops on which the staff could present their researches are organized by the universities.

In most of the reports it is indicated that the audited universities do not have the culture of publishing annual research reports. An activity as simple as this can help the stakeholders, especially industries and service-giving organizations, to become aware of the research priorities of the universities and collaborate with them to contribute to the successful undertaking of research projects.

2.10 Consultancy and Outreach Activities

One of the areas that link research with the community is the provision of consultancy services. Regarding this issue, it is heartening to see in the legislations of the audited universities that it has been understood that it is the job of universities to provide consultancy to industries and other social and economical establishments in their localities. There are even some instances of involvement of the audited HEIs in the areas. Mekele and Hawassa universities, for instance, are extending the service in the areas of agriculture, education, finance and health. Hawassa University particularly designated chemical industries as an area of interest for consultancy. However, the reports show that some of the audited universities' instructors tend to provide the consultancy services in a disorganized manner individually and without the knowledge of their institutions. This is due to the lack of sufficiently robust research and outreach policy in most of the HEIs.

PART THREE

3.1 Conclusions, Challenges and Lessons Learned

Through learning, teaching and research, higher education engages in the quest of academic scholarship and intellectual inquiry in all fields of human understanding. The production, advancement and dissemination of knowledge and the development of high-level human resources are the core functions of the higher education system. Higher education and research now “act as essential components of culture, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations” (Teshome, 2005). The dissemination of knowledge through teaching and collaboration in research tasks are the principal tools for developing academic and research staff through postgraduate study and training (Department of Education Pretoria, 1997). Cognizant of these facts, the Federal

democratic Republic of Ethiopia has been engaged in an ambitious project of expanding the higher education system. As a result, since 1992 (the new Education and Training Policy) more than 19 public universities and more than 50 private higher education institutions have come in to being. This is a huge investment on the part of the government and the private higher education institution owners by any standards.

HERQA has also been established in order to reduce the impact of quality problems that may arise due to the expansion process in 2003 with Proclamation Number 351/2003. The Agency has now grown in to a nationally recognized organization standing for the safeguarding, accreditation and enhancement of quality and relevance in higher Education. In undertaking these roles, HERQA has faced and still faces many challenges but it is concluded that by helping to bring quality to the top of the agenda and by engaging with higher educational institutions to carry out quality audits, it has contributed significantly to enhancing the quality of higher education in Ethiopia. It *continues to* assure and enhance the quality of higher education in Ethiopia and has developed a strategy and work plans in furtherance of that end. It is acknowledged that there is no doubt that the concept of quality and the need to assure and enhance quality is fully embraced in both public and private higher education institutions in Ethiopia. But it is also recognized that it is early days and few higher education institutions have accommodated an explicit quality assurance function within their legislation. Similarly, it is still rare for higher education institutions to have a quality assurance policy or strategy. A number of higher education institutions have set up quality assurance units but these are very much in their infancy and are just becoming functional. What are yet to be developed in most higher education institutions are mechanisms for the systematic collection and analysis of data that informs decisions on quality. HERQA is seeking to promote the development of such systems at every opportunity available to it.

The institutional quality audits reported that, in the main, the systems that are in operation place too great a reliance on individual instructors, are based on norm referencing and do not involve moderation. It is concluded that such systems are insufficiently robust to assure compatibility of grading standards between cohorts of students. There is also a concern for fairness. In many higher education institutions there is no sufficiently transparent system that ensures that students are graded fairly and consistently. While students can appeal against their grade this must be seen as an additional mechanism and not the sole mechanism that

guarantees fairness. Similarly, without inter-institution moderation, HERQA has a concern for grade comparability between different higher education institutions.

A number of quality related problems exist in the higher education system in Ethiopia. Paramount among these is human capacity. There is a general lack of expertise and experience in quality assurance related matters in higher education institutions. This is a particular dimension of the current general problem of a lack of well qualified and experienced academic and administrative staff in a rapidly expanding higher education system. This also impacts on the work of HERQA as it seeks credible individuals to be trained as external quality auditors and to be involved in program accreditation. However, the Government has embarked on a program of staff development that should help to alleviate this problem and lead to quality enhancement.

The quality of higher education is not solely dependent on the staffing in higher education institutions. While the Federal Government of Ethiopia has made a huge investment in higher education, including a massive building program, external institutional quality audits indicate that many institutions consider themselves to be short of resources. However, few institutions have sound systems to ensure efficient resource management. Improving the ways existing resources are deployed can make a useful contribution to quality enhancement.

There are significant gender issues within HEIs. Females are in a minority both among staff and student bodies, the latter despite affirmative action directed towards its amelioration. Female academics with higher level qualifications are not part of the academic profile and consequently few female academics occupy senior positions. The absence of such role models can be deemed to have a negative effect on the academic performance of female students. This may be a factor in the high levels of attrition which are registered in the case of female students. In the case of some HEIs efforts have been made to provide support through the appointment of gender officers and the provision of gender-based tutorial support. One private HEI – Unity University College – offers a fully integrated support regime. Despite such measures it would appear that higher education has a long way to go before gender parity is attained.

Lessons Learned

The following are among important lessons which serve to guide HERQA:

- The importance of communication with its stakeholders. It is one of the duties of HERQA to give information to the public about the current situation and status of the institutions periodically and to gather and disseminate information about the standards and programs of study offered by foreign and local higher education institutions (Higher Education Proclamation no 351, 2003). In order to discharge these responsibilities effectively and efficiently, it has found the traditional tools of communication such as brochures, announcements on radio and TV and participating in symposiums and workshops not enough to reach all the stakeholders. It has therefore begun participating in exhibitions, inviting stakeholders to come to the Agency in person and enquire information etc. It has also planned to further its efforts proactively in the future.
- One of the issues HERQA demands of HEIs is to develop a system through which they can distribute good practices among the various units of the Institutions. It is one of the issues that the Agency also wants to engage in, namely to circulate instances of good practices among HEIs. HERQA has learnt that it can be an agent of distribution of good practices gained from one institution to the others and can be a forum for discussions on quality and quality assurance.
- HERQA believes that quality assurance is primarily the job of HEIs. However, the Agency has found it essential to develop a mechanism to check the move of some fraudulent HEIs. It has therefore planned to strengthen the practice of making surprise inspections of private HEIs which it introduced in 2007.
- HERQA has taken it as a major lesson that it has to work harder to build the capacity of HEIs in establishing quality assurance system so that they can take on the responsibility of quality assurance on their own. For this reason more training of instructors and managers working in the quality assurance committees and units of HEIs have been planned to take place. The Agency has also been collaborating with the Dutch Government Funded NGO, EQUIP, which also operates in the higher education area, on their development programs for HEI academics.

- HERQA has learned that it is not enough for the Agency to confine itself to the mandate set out in Proclamation 351. It has to work harder to widen its scope based on the experience to be gained from engagement with countries whose agencies have accumulated significant expertise in the area.

Appendix 1

Documents available to support the process of External institutional Quality Audit

No	Title	Volume	Year of Publication
1	A report on the Joint HERQA-ADRC Workshop	001	2005
2	A Proceeding on the HERQA –HEIs Kick off workshop	002	
3	Summary of the Pilot External Quality Audit of St Mary's College	005	2006
4	Summary of the Pilot External Quality Audit of Debub University	006	2006
5	Summary of the Pilot External Quality Audit of Unity College		2006
6	Subject Benchmarking Guidelines	008	2006
7	HERQA Profile		2006
8	Areas of Focus for Institutional Quality Audit	009	2007
9	HERQA Institutional Audit Procedure	010	2007
10	Preparing a Self Evaluation Document	015	2007
11	HERQA Assessors' Check list		
12	Presentations from the HERQA National Conference : Advancing Higher Education In Ethiopia	017	2007
13	Institutional Self Evaluation		2007
14	Quality Audit Reports (Information on the Institutional Quality Audit Reports produced by the Higher Education Quality Agency (HERQA) following Institutional Quality Audits)		2007

Appendix 2

The documents in print to support the process of pre-accreditation, accreditation and re-accreditation

No	Title	Volume	Year of Publication
1	List of Accredited, Pre-accredited higher Education Institutions (in Amharic)	016	2007
2	List of Accredited, Pre-accredited higher Education Institutions (in Amharic)	007	2006
3	List of Accredited, Pre-accredited higher Education Institutions (in Amharic)	019	2008
4	Pre-accreditation of Graduate Programs	014	2007
5	Pre-accreditation, Accreditation and Reaccreditation Application Checklist	022	2008
6	HERQA Experts” Site Visit Checklist (Requirements for Pre-accreditation, Accreditation and Reaccreditation)	020	2008
7	Pre-accreditation, Accreditation and Reaccreditation Procedures	021	2008
8	HERQA Assessors” Checklist	023	2008

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